

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee IN SUPPORT OF Funding for the Connecticut Mental Health Center

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Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Committee, I am writing IN SUPPORT of funding for the Connecticut Mental Health Center and DMHAS. It saddens me to hear about the consideration of funding cuts to our mental health system in Connecticut, specifically as it affects New Haven's Connecticut Mental Health Center. I am a psychiatry resident at Yale holding the degree of medical doctor, and a significant portion of my training takes place at CMHC. In fact, CMHC was one of the principal reasons I chose residency at Yale—for its commitment to providing mental health to underserved populations in a diverse city, serving as a safety net for its patients with chronic mental illness and addictions, and for my ability to serve as part of this network to alleviate suffering among some of the most severely mentally ill. I am planning to spend a majority of my next two years of training at CMHC, but unfortunately funding cuts could make that impossible given that trainee positions would be sacrificed along with the budget. Previous budget cuts have already led to loss of over half the resident positions at CMHC. I am one of many residents who plans to continue working within public psychiatry, and further, pursue the Public Psychiatry Fellowship offered by Yale and CMHC, which trains many young psychiatrists in the public mental health system. I am only one example of young doctors who was attracted by CMHC and plans to stay in New Haven to continue to serve the mentally ill. I am an example of how CMHC has served as a pipeline, attracting and holding on to young professionals who go on to serve as mental health providers within the public sector, alleviating the burden of a dire shortage of mental health providers at a state and national level. Budget cuts would make my future in public psychiatry very uncertain.

I would like to highlight the story of a Hispanic patient of mine, "Maria" (name changed for anonymity), who took a bus to New Haven in a psychiatric crisis. She was struggling with crippling paranoia and a fixed belief that she was contaminating everyone she touched. She could no longer go to school or work and could barely leave her apartment. She saw the sign for Connecticut Mental Health Center, literally just walked in, and was evaluated by me and Acute Services staff who immediately connected her with a mental health outpatient provider within a couple of days. Had Maria not been served by CMHC, she would have utilized the emergency room (in fact that had been her plan). By the very presence of CMHC she was able to get connected to treatment quickly and avoid a much more costly intervention. The availability of CMHC to those in crisis is not only a necessary safety net for financially disadvantaged people with mental illness; it is a resource that alleviates other more expensive services upon which the burden of mental illness would otherwise fall—emergency rooms, inpatient units, and law enforcement/jails and prisons. I would like to emphasize not only the moral necessity of protecting the right to mental health care for people like Maria, but also the essential role that mental health centers like CMHC serve in our society. I realize the pressures of budget deficits makes these decisions very difficult, but I urge you to please consider the very negative impact upon mental health care in Connecticut that cuts to DMHAS would have, and urge you to make mental health a priority in this critical time. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

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